

STONE (A. J.)

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

—TO THE—

Minnesota State Medical Society

—DELIVERED—

JUNE 22d, 1881,

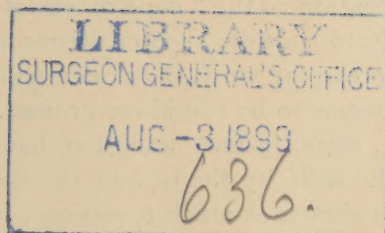
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PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL ADDRESS

—TO THE—

Minnesota State Medical Society,

JUNE 22d, 1881.

GENTLEMEN: In accordance with custom I am expected to address you, and place before you such suggestions as may have occurred to me during my term of office, and which will, in my mind, tend to the advancement of our society or to the honor of our profession.

Of the advance which our profession has made in almost every field since our last meeting, I do not feel called upon to speak; I should but imperfectly summarize facts which are familiar to all of you, and in a much less eloquent manner than it has been detailed by others within the past few months.

I am satisfied, from my observation during the past year, that no suggestion is needed from your president to ensure active work and hearty co-operation upon the part of every individual member of the society, to the end that this association may honor the profession in its existence. But, after deliberate consideration, I do feel constrained to call your attention to the written law which is supposed to govern our actions in all matters professional. In draw-

ing your attention to the "code of ethics," and in asking you candidly to consider such criticisms as I shall present to you in no carping spirit, I am aware that I am treading upon what seems to be forbidden ground.

The code, since its final adoption, has apparently been laid upon the shelf by the side of the family bible, to be treated with almost as much reverence, to be read quite as seldom, and to be quoted only when its provisions enable one to discipline a rival, or to exclude him from the benefits of professional affiliation.

A judicial consideration of the code forces a conclusion that much which it contains is gratuitous insult to the profession, and more, is rather calculated to amuse than to impress with respect the mind of the layman.

There is not a clause or sentence in the first two articles which is not absolutely true; but, should the self-evident truths contained in article 1 be held constantly before the physician, as if by nature he was a brute who is to be taught the ordinary laws of humanity, a fool who must be taught a wisdom in the management of his patients which instinct alone would inculcate; a knave who must be withheld from empiricism; or a man without the instincts of a gentleman?

Granted that men enter the ranks of the profession to whom the epithets of "fool," "knave," or "clown," apply, of what value are the platitudes concerning brotherly love, or to what good is a formulated code defining the relations of medical men to the public or to each other? Among gentlemen such a code is unnecessary; among pirates it only serves to foster a cathauling hostility; as between a gentleman and a pirate, any difficulty which may arise is not to be satisfactorily settled by a reference to any code because the standpoints from which each look at matters differ too widely—nor are the penalties which the code imposes such as to deter a real rascal, nor is that unsovereign body, the medical profession, able to enforce its laws rigorously.

In general, the same criticisms apply to article II, where, hidden from their sight, are instructions to patients upon points which can only be determined by individuals and their circumstances, and I fear that, in a large majority of cases, the patient would resent as an impertinence the existence of this portion of the code, were his attention once called to it.

"Of the duties of physicians, for the support of professional character," section I contains, in my judgment, an unsound element of legislation, inasmuch as it requires all members of the profession to "observe strictly such laws as are instituted for the government of its members." While, in a limited sense, this is all well enough, yet, extended too far, it is vicious, and tends not only to impair the usefulness of the profession, but is repressive in its effect upon the genius and independence of progressive men.

To the clergy, who deal simply with faith, dogma is necessary, but we, who deal with facts and the practical application of their conclusions, are peculiarly exempt, by the very order of nature, from any provisional code which subjects, or claims the right to subject, our thoughts or methods.

Section III has, perhaps, been more frequently the cause of wrangling and the pretext for prosecutions than any other section in the code. No section is more openly and constantly violated, and with greater impunity than this one.

In this city, I believe it to have been violated at least once monthly by one regular physician for the past twelve years, and yet the individual has never been brought to task for his delinquencies by either the state or county society, of both of which he is to-day a member in good standing, and I believe the reason to be that the large majority of the members of the societies do not believe in the justice of the law, or occasionally evade its provisions themselves, or, to their credit be it spoken, are not willing

to use the law as a weapon with which to avenge personal grievances. Any one may advertise his craft to an extent and in a manner which is disgusting, but in the medical profession the boundary beyond which one cannot step without breaking the rules of decency must of necessity be very sharply defined. One cannot advertise his brains as he can merchandise. But that the specialist should be prohibited from calling attention to the fact that he is practising a specialty, or that the regular physician should be prohibited from advertising his place of business and business hours seems to be an absurdity. In cases of accident or of grave surgical operations, where peculiar circumstances attending the patient do not, through motives of delicacy, render their publication inadvisable, I believe that as a matter of news called for by the public, the press has the right to all the particulars, including the names of the physicians in attendance, and that the particulars should, as a matter of justice, to prevent error, be furnished by the physician himself.

The press of to-day is the power of the land. It is the great educator and the great leveler. It makes and unmakes more men than any other influence. It pricks bubbles and inflates them; its good will is eagerly sought by the clergy; is heartily appreciated and utilized by the lawyer; and through its columns even the usefulness of the army is aided or impaired. It is at once the greatest aid to true religion, and the greatest enemy to sham; the greatest power in forcing justice through the moulding of public sentiment which sits behind every jury, and the greatest stimulant to patriotism in the ranks of the army.

To every profession but the medical, the record of good work done, the praise, the blame, is a stimulant to further exertion, to better action—and withal a powerful lever to use in forwarding the honorable and legitimate ends of their professional life.

I do not here argue that it is, or is not, decorous to advertise, but that it is not in the province of a code to deter-

mine the question. If the code were abolished, but a short time would elapse before the good sense of the profession would, through an unwritten law, much more powerful than any written code, settle the question emphatically, and he guilty of constant violation of good taste speedily be ostracised from professional affiliation by common consent.

Article 4. *Of the duties of physicians in regard to consultations;* section 1 states a truism in holding the only professional evidence of professional abilities and acquirements to be a regular medical education, or a stated equivalent thereto, but the policy of its deduced conclusion that all others should be excluded, is doubtful.

The first duty of the profession is to the public. Any step, therefore, which it can take to secure public welfare, is taken in the right direction. The avowed object of this rigorous exclusion of all irregular practitioners from the benefits of consultation is to set the seal of public disapproval upon them, and indirectly to force them out of professional existence, in the interests of public welfare. That this result is devoutly to be hoped for, I am the last to dispute. But does this means best accomplish this end? Or, does this method appear to the public rather in the light of persecution, and therefore, in reality, tend to keep them in existence, upon the principle that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church?

The law of the survival of the fittest should nowhere hold good to a greater degree than among medical men, regular and irregular, and if, with our vaunted superiority, we fail to survive when put to the test of bedside association, then, and then only, can we be justified, as a matter of self-protection, in holding aloof from them, and insisting upon the rigorous enforcement of the rule above quoted.

Many a life, valuable to the State, is sacrificed through unwillingness of the patient to wound the feelings of an irregular practitioner by a dismissal and the employment of a regular (a step, which with his limited knowledge of

the relative value of his attendant's services as compared with those of some regular, seems to be a leap in the dark), and inability to procure a consultation from the regular which would not only save his life, but illustrate the difference between one who, after a regular education, was at liberty to utilize the accumulated wisdom of all men, and to prescribe any medicine in any dose which seemed to him wisest, and one whose teaching limits him to the practice of a dogma to the exclusion of many an indisputable fact—or worse, with one who has had no teaching to limit him to anything.

We may, perhaps, feel the freer to discuss this matter from this standpoint, inasmuch as so conservative a journal as the *British Medical* has opened its columns for its discussion. In my opinion, the code, as it stands, obliges us to protect the "regular" ignoramus sometimes to the detriment of his patients, while failing to permit the educated regular the use of the powerful weapon, knowledge, ever ready at his command for the discomfiture of the irregular practitioner.

As to the remainder of the code, I can but ask the question, *cui bono*. Do we need to be taught that we should treat each other as gentlemen? That we can commit a greater larceny than that of purse? That it is more our duty to prevent than cure? If these questions must be answered in the affirmative, then is our vaunted nobility—upon which so many changes have been rung—a myth.

Conservative men, and, indeed, all who oppose the reformer or reviser, are prone to call him an iconoclast, and to inquire what he will set up as better than that which he has cast down. The most powerful government of the world to-day has no written constitution, and our country is fast drifting towards the same condition. Unwritten law is everywhere more powerful than the written. I would destroy the written code, that one unwritten, of vastly more force, might arise from its ashes, and would suggest as a remedy for the evils for which it endeavors

to provide, the one omnipotent force in man—knowledge. I would insist upon such preliminary education before the student entered upon his medical course, that not only was his mind fitted for the reception and retention of the vast truths of the science, but his moral nature developed to such an extent as no other means can accomplish; and his gentlemanly instincts brought out and enlarged, as constant intercourse with scholarly men during his academic course cannot fail to do. Then such a medical course should be insisted upon as would leave no superficial training, no cramming of facts for special occasions, to be forgotten as the occasion passes—but a course of instruction passing over a period of from four to seven years—which is the minimum time in which a knowledge of our science adequate to our duties can be obtained. The first generation of such physicians would need no code to teach them to be men.

But some of the evils which our code attempts to reach cannot be cured by elevation of the professional standard, and we will find it necessary to apply the touch-stone to the people. Insist that the children shall be taught anatomy, physiology and chemistry, *pari passu* with their ordinary studies, increasing their knowledge in these branches proportionately as they advance in their academic studies, until they are prepared to understand and efficiently assist the scientific physician in his effort for their welfare, and are able to recognize of their own knowledge the educated scientist from the dogmatic ignoramus.

Throw aside all superstition attached to the profession of medicine, take time and pains to make its positive laws plain and simple to the popular mind, use the press and the platform to educate the masses up to a point where they can use their reasoning powers upon our profession as upon other matters concerning their daily welfare. The first generation of such men and women would never hesitate between quack and scientist. Evils exist in and

out of the profession which no code, written or unwritten, can reach. Peculiarly do they exist in this country, where constant immigration from the most ignorant classes of the old world is encouraged. Here, paternal government and restraint, if in the spirit of our institutions it be ever justifiable, is surely right, and for the protection of the people unable through ignorance to protect themselves, the state should legislate that no physician shall be allowed to practice within its boundaries until he has given evidence of his thorough qualification.

In presenting these thoughts for your consideration, I do not wish to be understood as advising disobedience to the code so long as it exists as the law of the profession. For more than twelve years I have practised medicine among you, and I defy any physician to say that I have ever violated the code in letter or spirit; and so long as it continues the law, I shall render obedience though questioning its wisdom. I trust that I may yet see our code abbreviated to one which simply requires every member to so conduct himself as becomes a physician and a gentleman.

